

Use of alpha-tocopherylquinone in ulcerative colitis SIR,—The personal experience reported by J D Bennet (*Gut* 1986; 27: 695–7) on the use of alpha-tocopherylquinone in the treatment of ulcerative colitis appears to be a most valuable contribution.

Tocopherols and their quinone derivatives are potent inhibitors of fatty-acid oxydation.¹ There is a striking correlation between consumption of polyunsaturated chemically processed fats – for example, margarine and shortening, and incidence of inflammatory bowel disease.^{2,3} Such polyunsaturated fats have a tendency to form peroxides which in turn are potent inhibitors of prostacyclin-synthesis.⁴ The most plausible mode of action for alpha-tocopherylquinone is a blockade of fatty acid-oxidation and a restoration of host defense mechanisms in the bowel mucosa.

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References

- 1 Weiss TJ. *Food oils and their uses*. 2nd ed. Westport 1983: 109–10.
- 2 Guthy E. Ätiologie des Morbus CROHN. *Dtsch Med Wochenschr* 1983; 102: 1729–33.
- 3 Nordenvall B, Broström D, Heners G. Entzündliche Darmkrankheiten und Nahrungsfette. *Dtsch Med Wochenschr* 1982; 107: 1900.
- 4 Moncada S. Biological importance of prostacyclin. *Br J Pharmacol* 1982; 76: 3–31.

Books

Diseases of the liver and biliary system. By Dame Sheila Sherlock. (Pp. 578; illustrated; £39.50.) Oxford & London: Blackwell Scientific Pub. 1985. It would be churlish in the extreme to look for faults in a book which is recognised world wide as the major reference work on clinical hepatology. Indeed, one should perhaps remind oneself first of its enviable record spanning 30 years, six previous editions and publication in six languages in addition to English. The presence of the seventh edition is a timely reminder that though officially retired from her academic post at the Royal Free Hospital the author continues to be our foremost hepatologist, and one has the impression that the eighth and perhaps the ninth editions are already 'on the stocks'.

At first glance the sixth and seventh editions look remarkably similar except for the colour of the cover and the six new honorary degrees and diplomas bestowed on its author since 1981. In fact one wonders how the tremendous advances particularly in areas such as viral hepatitis, scanning techniques, transplantation and drug toxicity have been contained in an edition only 36 pages longer than its predecessor. These and other advances are, however, fully covered and the book's ability to cover new ground and supply effective and helpful references is remarkable.

This new information, has, according to Dame Sheila, only been included by 'drastic pruning' of old material and references, though thankfully important historical aspects are retained and the spirit of the history of liver disease has not been lost. The style is as fresh as ever, the diagrams simple and effective, and the bibliography extensive and an extremely valuable starting point for the study of any topic in hepatology.

And am I going to be churlish? There really are a great number of histological photomicrographs, some of them requiring a hand lens; and the section on biliary tract disease is still only 40 pages long despite the fairly massive advances that have occurred.

I saved up for the last edition £24.00, and I have purchased all the previous ones except the second – when I got a complimentary copy. Though I shall have to take out a mortgage for this edition – £39.50 – I will not hesitate to make the necessary arrangements. I advise you to do the same.

A E READ

Lecture notes on the liver. By R Thompson. (Pp. 183; illustrated; £7.50.) Oxford: Blackwell, 1986. Hilliard Jason, a well known American medical educationalist, once wrote "... medical education has, paradoxically, become less a preparation for becoming a medical practitioner and more a preparation for becoming a medical student" One bit of evidence to support Jason's contention lies in the material which students read during their course. Instead of learning to use the books and journals which will be of use to them after they qualify they tend to use books which they believe will serve the more limited purpose of helping them to pass their examinations. Sadly some teachers encourage this approach. Potted texts might be acceptable if they were used simply as a first course, to whet the appetite for more meaty fare to come, or if they were used for revision just before the exams. Unfortunately, such texts tend to form the staple diet of many students, and I suspect that this results in attitudes which have a profound effect on the way